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ABSTRACT

The American School in Mexico City is a multicultural school drawing its students from the upper middle class with a pupil population of about 40% United States citizens, 40% Mexican, and 20% other nationalities. Admission is based on language proficiency, scholastic achievement, and ability to pay. The school admits monolingual Spanish speakers at kindergarten level only and provides a two- to three-year program of total immersion to prepare them to read in English at first grade. All through the elementary program, there is a half day of Spanish and a half day of English with course content taught in both languages. The middle school features a core curriculum combining social studies and English and incorporating the multicultural backgrounds of the students. At all levels, teaching strategies are based on recognition and appreciation of the students' cultural characteristics and differences. Family roles, community requirements, work ethics, student-teacher roles, and school attitudes are among the cultural variables taken into account in planning curriculum and teaching methods. Although the general goals of bilingualism may be similar in Mexico and the United States, bilingual programs in the two countries are different--largely because English, in Mexico, is an elite study. (JH)

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CORE CURRICULUM IN A MULTICULTURAL SCHOOL

A B S T R A C T

M. E. Cunningham - Mexico City

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Multicultural contacts are demonstrated by pairing participants unknown to each other and giving them two minutes to do a non-verbal introduction. This shows everyone how dependent one is on language for self expression, so that participants can have an idea of what it must be like not to speak the language and still learn about different cultures. Biculturalism comes not only from language differences but from differences in cognitive and socialization styles. The Mexican and American cultures are contrasted, without making value judgments, on a number of variables, i.e., family roles, community requirements, work ethics, student-teacher roles, and teaching styles.

Bilingual programs in the United States and Mexico are different because of student population, types of programs, and particular goals. In the United States, English is required for economic and educational survival; in Mexico English is an elite study. The American School in Mexico has admission requirements based on language proficiency, scholastic achievement, and ability to pay. The pupil population is about 40% United States, 40% Mexican and 20% other nationalities. The Middle School has a CORE program combining Social Studies and English. This allows teachers to have an extended period to infuse language skills into social studies units making use of the multicultural backgrounds of the students. Many examples are given of how this is done at each grade level. Participants were asked to apply this multicultural approach to their teaching situation.

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CORE CURRICULUM IN A MULTICULTURAL SCHOOL

Strategies for Multicultural Education in the Middle School

Did you ever try to introduce yourself without a language? At the beginning of my Bilingual Education class we had two minutes to do a non-verbal introduction, and we found that without language we have no status. One can pantomine a general profession i.e. mother, teacher, typist; but one must have language to tell about rank and degrees. This exercise helps teachers to recognize the cultural handicap of not speaking the language of the country.

We all have funny experiences to recount about cultural misunderstandings because of language. When we look at the way the same idea is expressed in language idioms, we see multiculturalism reflected in everyday expressions. For instance to say "Your slip is showing" up in Michigan we say "It's snowing down south". In Spanish you say "ando buscando novio" (looking for a boyfriend) or "te llama tu mama" (your mother is calling you). There are numerous idioms that show a multicultural expression of the same ideas.

Multiculturalism is not just language differences, but differences in cognitive and socialization styles. Ramirez and Castañeda have outlined these differences between the Mexican and Anglo societies in a way that does not make value judgments but does aid the teacher to understand the differences. The teacher must recognize the difference between the field dependent and field independent cognitive styles in order to construct learning experiences that take advantage of the way a child perceives his environment. One must know the difference between the extended family and nuclear family socialization style in order to know what the child's position is in the family structure.

Octavio Paz traces the difference in work ethic to the colonial history of Mexico and the United States. The Spanish conquest substituted an Indian ruling class with Spanish officers and priests who were also of the ruling class. They took over the land and put the Indians to work on huge haciendas.

The ruling class, the educated minority, did not do manual labor. In the United States the colonists were farmers, people who worked their own land; education idealized labor. With this cultural history in mind one should not be surprised that the Mexican does not see education related to work. Labor is regarded as demeaning, not ennobling. It is important for the teacher to learn about the historical role of labor and education among the cultural groups represented in the classroom.

The cultural view of community roles directly affects the student teacher relationship. If the authoritarian figure is seen as the source of approval, then the student's role is to win approval, not to learn for the sake of knowledge itself. In a society where the parents are only providers and the children can choose their own activities, then the teacher is more the director of activities and the students participate only for what individual success or gratification they find in the learning activity. The teacher must be aware of the cultural background of the child to know what the child wants from the teacher. Some children may need a great amount of affectionate approval in order to want to learn; others may need stimulating activities to inspire learning. The multicultural school must use both teaching styles - individualized and integrated.

Teaching strategies for bilingual and bicultural programs also differ in the United States and Mexico because of the differences in student population, types of programs, and particular goals. In the United States, English is required for economic and educational survival; in Mexico English is an elite study. The general goal of bilingualism may be the same in both countries but the programs are different.

The American School in Mexico City draws its students from the upper middle class with a pupil population of about 40% American, 40% Mexican, and 20% other nationalities. There are admission requirements based on language proficiency and scholastic achievement. The American School admits Spanish speakers only at kindergarden level, and there is a two to three year program of total immersion to prepare them to read in English at first grade. All through the elementary program there is a half day of Spanish and a half day of English with course content taught in both languages.

The middle school has a Core program which combines English and Social Studies integrating these areas with multicultural approaches. In the sixth grade the day is still divided into half English and half Spanish, but the two period Core class is in English. The sixth grade Social Studies program centers on Geography of the United States, but the teachers integrate this with all of North America so that students understand that the same chains of mountains extend through the continent but have different names in the United States and Mexico. Students work on projects that contrast Indian tribes of North America, and their literature selections relate to Social Studies units. The supplementary readings are about people who move so that children can understand a migrant society and deal with their own problems about moving or having their friends move.

The seventh grade social studies program of exploring the non-western world gives the greatest opportunity for multicultural experiences. Students begin with a study of Man in Groups or All About Us. When they examine specific countries there are many opportunities to have speakers from those countries give talks and demonstrations. The reading anthologies Small Planet and High Flight have literature from around the world with special appeal to the adolescent. Students explore differences in cultural values and participate in cultural experiences. At the end of a unit on Japan the class went to a Japanese restaurant and cooked their meal at the table using chopsticks.

Even in the eighth grade with its program of United States History, there are many opportunities for multicultural activities. Students did a family research project to find out why their ancestors came to the New World. They found that the motivation for immigration was the same in every era - political and religious freedom and economic opportunity. There are many interesting contrasts and comparisons to be made in looking at U.S. History from Mexico. As a young lieutenant, Robert E. Lee developed his tactical skills by finding a pass through the volcanic terrain south of Mexico City. The reading selections in the eighth grade relate to U.S. History, and include such books as Johany Tremaine, 1776 and The Red Badge of Courage.

Integration and individualization are the keys to adopting materials at any grade level to multicultural students. The teacher can use the cultural differences among the students to integrate their background into the subject, and to promote broad intercultural comparisons and a world view of history, geography and literature. Even if the student's language structures are limited, he can deal with concepts that relate to his cultural heritage. Individual projects allow students to pursue special interests at their own level of academic ability and to be assured of success and approval. Cultural difference should never be a handicap in the classroom but rather an enrichment that the teacher must learn to take advantage of through integration and individualization.

BICULTURALISM

Cognitive Style	Field Dependent ⟷	Field Independent
Socialization Style	Traditional ⟷	Urbanized
Family Roles	Extended Family ⟷	Nuclear Family
Parents	authorities	providers
Child	dependent	independent
Community	Authoritarian ⟷	Democratic
Work Ethic	demeaning ⟷	ennobling
School - teacher	Authority - approval ⟷	Director of activities
pupil	to win approval	to get good grades
Teaching Styles	Integrated ⟷	Individualized

CORE PROGRAM - INTEGRATED + INDIVIDUALIZED

MIDDLE SCHOOL	SOCIAL STUDIES	ENGLISH
GRADE 6	Windows on our World - U.S. Geography People + Places Natural environment + culture Beginnings of the U.S. U.S. Grows + Changes U.S. + the World	Literature Anthology - teachers select readings for S.S. units + reading levels Supplementary readings - about people who move ie. The Newcomers. The Cay
GRADE 7	Exploring the Non-Western World Culture + Geography - Africa Middle East Japan Russia	Anthologies - Literature from the Non-Western World Supplementary Readings - authors + settings in areas studied. i.e. Things Fall Apart. Split Bamboo
GRADE 8	America: Its People and Values - U.S. History Independence + Expansion Division + Reunion Resources + Workers National - World Politics	Choice of Readings Related to History - ie. Johnny Tremaine 1776, Red Badge of Courage Supplementary units on Courage or Survival